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(11) **EP 0 582 327 B1**

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION**

(45) Date of publication and mention
of the grant of the patent:
22.09.1999 Bulletin 1999/38

(51) Int. Cl.⁸: **A23G 9/18**, F25D 25/00,
A23L 3/36, A23G 9/22

(21) Application number: 93201978.9

(22) Date of filing: 06.07.1993

(54) **Method and apparatus for freezing aqueous liquid**

Verfahren und Vorrichtung zum Gefrieren wässriger Flüssigkeiten

Procédé et appareil pour refroidir des liquides contenant de l'eau

(84) Designated Contracting States:
BE DE DK ES FR GB IT NL SE

(30) Priority: 07.07.1992 GB 9214427

(43) Date of publication of application:
09.02.1994 Bulletin 1994/06

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• **DATABASE WPI Week 8910, Derwent**
Publications Ltd., London, GB; AN 89-072119 &
JP-A-1 023 853 (ETAB.GUYOMARCH S.A.) 26
January 1989

Remarks:

The file contains technical information submitted
after the application was filed and not included in
this specification

EP 0 582 327 B1

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Description

[0001] This invention relates to a method for making aerated ice-creams, chocolate ices and ice lollies and an apparatus for making ice lollies.

[0002] In the production of ice lollies a flavoured liquid is poured into moulds each comprising several hundred cavities. The moulds are then placed inside a refrigerator and left until the flavoured liquid has frozen through-out. The moulds are then removed from the refrigerator and inverted. A stream of warm air is then blown onto the back of the moulds to melt the outer surface of the lollies. As the surface melts the lollies slide downwardly out of their respective cavities.

[0003] It will be appreciated that the application of warm air requires heat to be applied to the moulds which then has to be taken out when the moulds are subsequently cooled. Furthermore, any sculptured features in the lollies become blurred and ill defined due to surface melting.

[0004] Various means have been tried to facilitate removal of the lollies from their moulds without warming. Such means include coating the surface of the mould with a low friction coating, for example TEFLON (RTM), and coating the mould with an organic release agent. These attempts have however been totally unsuccessful.

[0005] In FR-A-0132 412 the flavoured liquid is poured into moulds which are continually cooled by brine at a temperature of from -14°C to -30°C. The ice lollies are removed from their moulds by the application of mechanical compression forces.

[0006] We have discovered that there is a direct correlation between the rate at which an aqueous solution is cooled and the propensity of the frozen liquid to adhere to a surface. In particular, as the rate at which liquid is frozen is increased the tendency of the frozen liquid to adhere to a surface decreases. This was somewhat unexpected since in "The Friction and Lubrication of Solids", Part II, Chapter VIII, Oxford University Press, Messrs. Bowden and Tabor observed that when a liquid was frozen in contact with a block the adhesion between the frozen liquid and the block increased as the temperature decreased.

[0007] In the case of ice lollies, we have found that if the initial rate of cooling is sufficient the moulds can simply be turned over and the frozen lollies fall out (a small tap sometimes being necessary).

[0008] This has significant energy and throughput consequences. In particular, energy does not have to be wasted heating the moulds to release the lollies and then re-cooling the moulds. Furthermore, time does not have to be wasted heating the moulds.

[0009] There is however a second consideration. In particular, if the initial rate of cooling is too high the lollies crack as they freeze and the product leaves the mould in several pieces.

[0010] It will be appreciated that the present invention

is not limited to the production of ice lollies and is equally applicable to all aqueous products and, in particular, water containing foodstuffs including chocolate ices. It is also applicable to the freezing of water containing pharmaceutical products.

[0011] WO/90 06693 discloses that the adhesion of pre-shaped water containing goods to a conveyor belt can be reduced by pre-cooling the conveyor before the water containing goods are brought into contact with the conveyor. However, the disclosure does not specifically address the production of ice lollies and does not recognise that there is only a narrow band of temperatures over which easy release can be obtained with lack of structural damage.

[0012] According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of making an aerated ice-cream or chocolate ice by freezing an aqueous liquid which method comprises the steps of:

- a) pre-cooling a mould to a temperature which is sufficiently cold such that the frozen aqueous liquid can be readily released from said mould and which is at or colder than -60°C but which is not so cold that the frozen aqueous liquid is subject to structural damage;
- b) introducing the aqueous liquid into said mould;
- c) allowing at least the aqueous liquid in contact with said mould to freeze; and
- d) releasing said frozen aqueous liquid from said mould.

[0013] According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of making an ice lolly by freezing an aqueous liquid which method comprises the steps of:

- a) pre-cooling a mould to a temperature which is sufficiently cold such that the frozen aqueous liquid can be readily released from said mould and which is at or colder than -60°C but which is not colder than -85°C so that the frozen aqueous liquid is not subject to structural damage;
- b) introducing the aqueous liquid into said mould;
- c) allowing at least the aqueous liquid in contact with said mould to freeze; and
- d) releasing said frozen aqueous liquid from said mould.

[0014] Advantageously, the surface of the mould intended to contact the aqueous liquid is NOT cooled below -85°C and preferably not below -80°C to inhibit structural damage to the frozen product.

[0015] Advantageously, said mould is pre-cooled to a temperature of from -70°C to -80°C.

[0016] Because of the necessity to warm prior art moulds it has been customary to make the moulds of relatively thin material, for example aluminium or stainless steel with an average thickness of about 0.5mm. In

contrast, moulds for carrying out the present invention preferably have a relatively high thermal capacity to ensure sufficiently rapid cooling. Typically, the moulds will be made from aluminium or stainless steel and will have an average wall thickness of at least 1mm, and preferably at least 2mm.

[0017] If desired, the moulds may contain passage-ways for the passage of a coolant therethrough.

[0018] The aqueous liquid may contain sugar if desired.

[0019] The aqueous liquid may be allowed to remain in the mould until frozen throughout. However, in the preparation of chocolate ices a charge of viscous chocolate may be poured into a mould, the surface of the chocolate frozen and the mould carefully inverted to allow the unfrozen aqueous liquid to flow from the mould. A different liquid or pasty product may then be poured into the crust and the whole allowed to freeze throughout before inversion of the mould and release of the contents with a sharp tap on the mould. It should be noted that careful temperature control is necessary in this process to ensure that there is a little adhesion between the chocolate and the moulds so that the crusts do not fall out of their cavities during the first inversion.

[0020] The present invention also provides an apparatus for carrying out a method in accordance with the invention, which apparatus comprises a vessel, a mould dividing said vessel into an upper portion and a lower portion, means to admit a coolant into said lower portion, means to withdraw coolant from said lower portion, means for filling said cavities with ice lolly solution, means for moving said cavities, means for inserting sticks into said cavities downstream of said filling means, and means for withdrawing frozen ice lollies from said cavities, and means for cooling said coolant with liquid nitrogen, characterized by said mould having cavities made from thermally conductive material and having an average thickness of at least 1mm.

[0021] Reference is made to "average thickness" as moulds with fins designed to create features in the surface of the ice lollies are known. However, the distribution of such fins in moulds known to the inventors is sparse.

[0022] Preferably, said average thickness is at least 2mm.

[0023] Advantageously, said thermally conductive material is selected from the group comprising stainless steel, copper, aluminium, brass and mixtures thereof.

[0024] Preferably, said mould has at least one passage to allow a cryogen to pass therethrough.

[0025] If desired, said cavities may, in use, be cooled by partial immersion in said coolant. Alternatively, means may be provided for spraying coolant against said cavities.

[0026] In a particularly preferred embodiment, the coolant is only used for part of the manufacturing cycle, the balance of the refrigeration being provided by a

mechanical refrigeration unit. In such an embodiment the coolant might be used for pre-cooling the moulds and, optionally, during one or more of the following steps:-

1. filling the cavities, and
2. initial cooling after filling.

[0027] Preferably, said apparatus includes means for introducing nitrogen from said cooling means into the upper portion of said vessel.

[0028] Advantageously, said means for moving said cavities comprises a stepping motor.

[0029] In another embodiment, said apparatus comprises a tunnel, a mould in the form of a continuous belt mounted in said tunnel, said mould having a plurality of cavities therein, means to admit a coolant into said tunnel, means for filling said cavities with ice lolly solution, means for moving said cavities and means for inserting sticks into said cavities downstream of said filling means.

[0030] For a better understanding of the invention reference will now be made to the following Examples and the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Figure 1 is a schematic drawing of our test apparatus;

Figure 2 is a graph showing the effect of pre-cooling on adhesion;

Figure 3 is a schematic vertical cross-section through one embodiment of an apparatus in accordance with the invention;

Figure 4 is a schematic vertical cross-section through a second embodiment of an apparatus in accordance with the invention, and

Figure 5 is a schematic plan view of a third embodiment of an apparatus in accordance with the invention.

EXAMPLE 1 - A multi-cavity mould of stainless steel approximately 2mm in thickness and at room temperature was filled with a solution of 10% (by volume) gelatin in water. The mould was placed in a mechanical refrigerator at -20°C and left for 4 hours to freeze throughout.

On inversion of the mould the lollies remained fast in the mould and could not be removed even when the mould was tapped with a small hammer.

EXAMPLE 2 - The procedure of Example 1 was repeated but using solid carbon dioxide at -50°C as the refrigerant. Again the lollies could not be extracted from the mould.

EXAMPLE 3 - The procedure of Example 1 was repeated except the mould was cooled by being lowered into a bath of liquid nitrogen at -196°C. On inverting the mould the lollies remained in place. They also remained in place even when the mould was tapped vigorously.

EXAMPLE 4 - The procedure of Example 2 was repeated except that the mould was pre-cooled to -50°C prior to adding the liquid. The lollies did not fall out of the moulds on inversion but did fall out when the mould was tapped firmly.

EXAMPLE 5 - The procedure of Example 1 was repeated except that the mould was pre-cooled to -70°C by exposure to vapour from liquid nitrogen. On inverting the mould some of the lollies dropped straight out and the remainder fell out when the mould was tapped.

EXAMPLE 6 - The procedure of Example 5 was repeated except the mould was replaced by a mould of stainless steel having a wall thickness of 1mm. On inverting the mould most of the lollies dropped straight out and the remainder followed on gently tapping the back of the mould.

From the above Examples we deduced that the rate at which heat is extracted from the liquid is critical. It will be noted that although the mould in Example 3 was plunged in liquid nitrogen (-196°C) the cooling rate was inadequate.

Clearly, from Examples 1 to 3 the cooling rate was too low whilst in Example 4 to 6 the cooling rate was sufficient.

To test our hypothesis the apparatus shown in Figure 1 was constructed. The apparatus, which is generally identified by reference numeral 1 comprised a brass block 2 weighing approximately 1.5kg; a tube 3 of plastics material 12mm in diameter; a spring balance 5; a tension wire 6 and a rod 7 which projected through holes in the tube 3 as shown.

In use, brass block 2 was placed in a refrigerator set to a particular temperature for several hours until the brass block 2 was at a uniform temperature throughout. The brass block 2 was then removed from the refrigerator and the tube 3, complete with the rod 7 and tension wire placed thereon.

5ml of an aqueous solution of 10% gelatin (by volume) was then poured into the tube 3. The arrangement was then returned to the refrigerator and left for several hours for the solution to freeze throughout.

On removal from the refrigerator the tension wire was connected to the spring balance 5 which was raised slowly until the frozen solution separated from the brass block 2. The maximum reading of the spring balance 5 was recorded.

The procedure was repeated several times at various temperatures and the adhesive force (the reading on the spring balance 5 less the weight of the lifted mass) recorded.

The results are shown in Figure 2.

It will be noted that although there is a spread in the results, particularly at higher temperatures, the adhesive force reduced very substantially as the temperature of the brass block 1 was lowered.

When the brass block 1 was pre-cooled to -70°C no adhesive force could be measured with the spring balance 5.

In view of the work of Bowden and Tabor we concluded that low temperature itself is not the determining factor but the RATE of cooling. It will be appreciated that in the experiments described above the 1.5kg mass of the brass block 2 was sufficient to provide an essentially constant temperature source for freezing.

The calculated cooling rate in the liquid 1mm from the interface between the liquid and the mould has been indicated in Figure 2. It will be seen that at a cooling rate of greater than 650°C/min the adhesion is minimal.

Transferring the above data into the commercial freezing of ice lollies it should be recalled that when the moulds are inverted the ice lollies have a certain mass. However, and far more significantly, if the moulds are pivotally mounted and are allowed to drop against a bar when the mould is inverted the impact will release the ice lollies even though they adhere to some extent to the moulds.

Quite acceptable cooling rates 1mm beneath the surface would be of the order of 650 to 750°C/min.

As indicated above the cooling rate need only be sustained sufficiently long to ensure the formation of a frozen crust and the internal freezing can proceed at a more leisurely pace if desired.

Obviously, the rate of cooling sustained must be sufficient so that the heat remaining in the liquid does not melt the frozen crust. The heat transfer rate to be sustained depends on the thermal conductivity of the liquid, for example an aerated ice cream has far lower thermal conductivity than a sugar solution for making ice lollies.

An interesting advantage of the present invention is that whereas the shape and configuration of features on the surface of lollies removed from conventional warm air released moulds is generally blurred, the features on the surface of lollies frozen in accordance with the invention is extremely sharp. In this connection, ice lollies and chocolate ices in the shape of animals, birds and figures are becoming increasingly popular. Such shapes are made using moulds having parts which can be physically separated to release the frozen product.

The present invention envisages a mould which, unlike prior art moulds, which are relatively thin, is relatively thick and has channels therein for the passage of a cryogen therethrough. However, for high production rates it may be preferable to either partially submerge the moulds in a liquid cryogen or spray them with liquid cryogen.

Whilst we would strongly recommend liquid nitrogen as the source of pre-cooling the moulds other cryogenics could also be used. Solid carbon

dioxide might commercially be used although the majority of normal refrigerants would not lower the temperature of the moulds sufficiently to be effective in a commercial environment without the use of complex energy expensive refrigeration systems.

Whilst Examples 1 to 6 clearly show the importance of pre-cooling the moulds to facilitate release, further work has shown that if the moulds are excessively pre-cooled then the frozen product is liable to suffer structural damage.

EXAMPLE 7 - A mould of stainless steel approximately 2 mm in thickness was placed in a liquid nitrogen refrigerator set to -90°C overnight so that it had a uniform temperature of -90°C. The mould was intended for making rocket shaped ice lollies having a cylindrical body approximately 10 cm long and 12 mm in diameter. A solution of 10% (by volume) gelatin in water was introduced into the mould. The water rapidly froze. However, during freezing there was a sharp audible crack. When the mould was inverted about two-thirds of the body fell out followed by the top one-third as a separate and distinct piece. The product was thus unmarketable.

EXAMPLE 8 - The procedure of Example 7 was repeated several times except the mould was pre-cooled to -85°C. The results at this temperature were varied. Seven samples broke in two with a muted crack. Five samples appeared quite satisfactory.

EXAMPLE 9 - The procedure of Example 7 was repeated several times except the mould was pre-cooled to -80°C. All the ice lollies produced were found to be structurally sound.

[0031] From the results of Examples 7 to 9 it is clear that excessively rapid cooling is undesirable. It is anticipated that the lowest temperature to which a mould can be pre-cooled may vary a little according to the composition of the aqueous product.

[0032] In the commercial production of ice lollies using one know machine, the moulds are partially filled with liquid at a filling station. The sticks are then lowered into the cavities and held in position until the ice lollies are frozen throughout. The moulds are then warmed and the ice lollies lifted out of their cavities by their sticks when the moulds have been warmed sufficiently.

[0033] When adapting this production technique for the present invention we have noted that when the sticks are inserted into the aqueous liquid part of the liquid is displaced and comes into contact with the wall of the cavity.

[0034] It is particularly important to ensure that the mould has sufficient thermal conductivity to ensure that this displaced liquid is sufficiently rapidly cooled when it comes into contact with the wall of the cavity that it does not materially adhere thereto.

[0035] During the manufacture of ice lollies, the aqueous liquid is typically pre-cooled to close to its freezing

point prior to being introduced into the moulds. The whole conventional process from introduction of the aqueous liquid to withdrawal of the frozen ice lollies typically takes about 4 minutes. In contrast, the present invention typically reduces this time by nearly one half.

[0036] It will be noted that accurate temperature control is important to the success of the present invention and it is recommended that the moulds themselves be cooled by a liquid such as DOWTHERM (RTM), methanol or SYLTHERM XLT (RTM) whose waxing temperatures are -73°C, -85°C and -110°C respectively. The liquid itself should be cooled by direct or indirect heat exchange with liquid nitrogen.

[0037] Referring now to Figure 3 there is shown an apparatus for the continuous production of ice lollies. The apparatus, which is generally identified by reference numeral 101 comprises a vessel 102 which is divided into an upper portion 103 and a lower portion 104 by a mould 105 containing a multiplicity of cavities 106.

[0038] The mould 105 is fabricated from stainless steel and is generally 2 mm in thickness. When viewed from above the mould 105 is of circular cross-section and can be rotated relative to the vessel 102 by means of a stepping motor 107.

[0039] In use, liquid nitrogen is admitted to a heat exchanger 108 via a control valve 109. The liquid nitrogen cools a stream of coolant (SYLTHERM XLT (RTM)) from pipe 110 to -82°C. The cold coolant leaves the heat exchanger 108 through pipe 111 and is admitted to the lower portion 104 of the vessel 102.

[0040] It will be noted that the lower portion 104 of the vessel 102 is of substantial volume and this provides a substantially constant low temperature source for cooling the mould 105. The coolant leaves the lower portion 104 of the vessel 102 through pipe 112 and is fed to the inlet of pump 113 which continually circulates coolant through the vessel 102.

[0041] The temperature of the coolant in pipes 111 and 112 is measured by temperature sensors 114 and 115 respectively and the control valve 109 is opened and closed as a function of the temperature sensed by the temperature sensor 115 and the difference between temperature sensor 115 and temperature sensor 114.

[0042] In use, the apparatus 101 is first cooled by the coolant.

[0043] Ice lolly solution is then pumped from chiller 116 by gear pump 117 to a valve 118. When valve 118 is closed the solution passes through pressure relief valve 119 to the chiller 116.

[0044] Stepping motor 107 is activated at regular intervals to rotate the mould 105 by a fixed amount. As each set of cavities 106 stops beneath dispenser assembly 120 valve 118 is opened for a fixed period of time during which the cavities 106 are filled to 1 cm from the top.

[0045] The ice lolly solution immediately starts to freeze and by the time the cavities 106 have been

advanced six times by the stepping motor 107 the ice lolly solution has formed a crust adjacent the cavities 106 although the ice lolly solution in the centre of the cavities 106 is still slushy.

[0046] At this time sticks are inserted into the cavities 106 at a stick insertion station (not shown). The sticks penetrate the slushy liquid near the bottom of the cavities 106 and, by the time the sticks are released before the next stepping operation are held securely in place.

[0047] After a further ten stepping operations the sticks are gripped and the whole frozen ice lollies withdrawn upwardly from the cavities 106.

[0048] The cavities 106 are then re-cooled to their original temperature during the next four stepping operations after which the process is repeated.

[0049] The entire process from injection to removal takes 100 seconds.

[0050] In order to inhibit ice forming inside the vessel 102 gaseous nitrogen from the heat exchanger 108 is passed through pipe 121 into the upper portion 103 of the vessel 102 and then vented to atmosphere via fan 122 and vent 123.

[0051] Whilst the cavities in Figure 3 are cooled by immersion in coolant it would equally be possible to spray the cavities with sufficient coolant.

[0052] Turning now to Figure 4, there is shown an apparatus which is generally similar to the apparatus shown in Figure 3 except that the lower portion of the apparatus is divided into two zones, one of which 103' uses coolant indirectly cooled by liquid nitrogen and the other of which 103'' uses coolant indirectly cooled by a mechanical refrigeration unit (not shown). The zones 103' and 103'' are separated by walls 125, 126 and cooling is effected by spraying the coolant in each zone against the cavities as they pass through the zones.

[0053] Briefly, as the cavities pass clockwise over wall 125 they are pre-cooled to approximately -82°C. The cavities are then filled with pre-chilled ice lolly solution at filling station 127. The filled cavities are then further cooled by liquid nitrogen cooled coolant until they pass over wall 126. At this point they are cooled by sprays of the same coolant indirectly cooled by a mechanical refrigeration system to a somewhat warmer temperature. Sticks are inserted at stick insertion station 128 and after substantially complete cooling the frozen ice lollies are removed at removal station 129.

[0054] By using liquid nitrogen for providing the lower pre-cooling temperature required and mechanical refrigeration for providing the in-depth freezing the overall process becomes extremely attractive.

[0055] Referring now to Figure 5, there is shown a tunnel freezer which is generally identified by the reference numeral 201.

[0056] The tunnel freezer comprises a tunnel 202 having a belt 205 provided with a multiplicity of cavities 206.

[0057] In use liquid nitrogen is introduced into the tunnel 202 via valve 209 and spray header 210 to maintain the interior of the tunnel 202 at approximately -84°C.

[0058] The cavities 206a are thus at approximately -84°C as they pass under dispenser assembly 220 which substantially fills the cavities with ice lolly solution.

[0059] As the cavities 206 move along the tunnel 202 in the direction of arrow 'A' the liquid immediately adjacent the cavities 206 forms a crust whilst the liquid inside becomes slushy.

[0060] At this point a stick inserter 224 inserts sticks into the slush. Freezing is then completed as the cavities pass out of the end of the tunnel 202 where they simply fall out of the cavities as they pass over drive wheel 225.

[0061] The tunnel 202 is provided with an extract fan 222 and vent 223. The tunnel 202 is also provided with mixing fans 226 to induce turbulence in the tunnel 202 and thereby enhance heat transfer.

[0062] Whilst the apparatus shown in Figure 3 is intended for producing high quality ice lollies which can be sculptured to some extent the apparatus shown in Figure 4 is intended for the inexpensive production of simple ice lollies.

[0063] In the Examples disclosed the temperatures of the cavities were measured using a thermocouple on the inner surface of the cavity, i.e., the surface which the aqueous liquid contacts.

Claims

1. A method of making an aerated ice-cream or chocolate ice by freezing an aqueous liquid, which method comprises the steps of:

- a) pre-cooling a mould to a temperature which is sufficiently cold such that the frozen aqueous liquid can be readily released from said mould and which is at or colder than -60°C but which is not so cold that the frozen aqueous liquid is subject to structural damage;
- b) introducing the aqueous liquid into said mould;
- c) allowing at least the aqueous liquid in contact with said mould to freeze; and
- d) releasing said frozen aqueous liquid from said mould.

2. A method of making an ice lolly by freezing an aqueous liquid, which method comprises the steps of:

- a) pre-cooling a mould to a temperature which is sufficiently cold such that the frozen aqueous liquid can be readily released from said mould and which is at or colder than -60°C but which is not colder than -85°C so that the frozen aqueous liquid is not subject to structural damage;
- b) introducing the aqueous liquid into said mould;

- c) allowing at least the aqueous liquid in contact with said mould to freeze; and
d) releasing said frozen aqueous liquid from said mould.
3. A method according to any preceding Claim, wherein such mould is not pre-cooled to lower than -85°C.
 4. A method according to Claim 3, characterized in that said mould is not pre-cooled to a temperature lower than -80°C.
 5. A method according to Claim 4, characterized in that said mould is pre-cooled to a temperature of from -70°C to -80°C.
 6. A method according to any preceding Claim, characterized in that at least part of said mould has an average wall thickness of at least 1mm.
 7. A method according to Claim 6, characterized in that at least part of said mould has an average wall thickness of at least 2mm.
 8. A method as claimed in any preceding Claim, characterized in that said aqueous liquid contains sugar.
 9. A method according to any preceding Claim, characterized in that only the aqueous liquid adjacent the mould is allowed to freeze to form a crust and that said method includes the step of extracting (unfrozen) liquid from said moulds so that said crust forms a shell.
 10. A method according to any preceding Claim, characterized in that said cooling rate in said liquid 1mm from the interface between said liquid and said mould is at least 650°C/min at least during initial freezing.
 11. A method according to Claim 14, characterized in that said cooling rate is at least 750°C/min.
 12. A method according to any preceding Claim, characterized in that the rate of heat transfer subsequent to the formation of an initial frozen crust is maintained at a level sufficient to prevent the thawing of said crust.
 13. A method according to any preceding Claim, characterized in that said mould is inverted to release said frozen liquid from said mould.
 14. A method according to Claim 13, wherein said mould is jarred to facilitate the release of said frozen liquid.
 15. A method according to Claim 14, wherein said mould is dropped against a bar as it is inverted to facilitate the release of said frozen liquid.
 16. A method according to any preceding Claim, including the step of using mechanical refrigeration to help freeze said aqueous liquid after introduction into said mould.
 17. An apparatus for carrying out a method according to Claim 2, said apparatus comprising a vessel (102), a mould (105) dividing said vessel (102) into an upper portion (103) and a lower portion (104), means (111) to admit a coolant into said lower portion (104), means (112) to withdraw coolant from said lower portion (104), means (120) for filling said cavities (106) with ice lolly solution, means (107) for moving said cavities (106), means for inserting sticks into said cavities downstream of said filling means (120), and means for withdrawing frozen ice lollies from said cavities (105), and means (108) for cooling said coolant with liquid nitrogen, characterized by said mould (105;205) having cavities (106;206) made from thermally conductive material and having an average thickness of at least 2mm.
 18. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 17, wherein said average thickness is at least 2mm.
 19. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 17 or 18, wherein said thermally conductive material is selected from the group comprising stainless steel, copper, aluminium, brass and mixtures thereof.
 20. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 17, 18 or 19, wherein said mould has at least one passage to allow a cryogen to pass therethrough.
 21. An apparatus as claimed in any of the Claims 17 to 20, including means for spraying coolant against said cavities.
 22. An apparatus as claimed in any of Claims 17 to 21, including means for dividing said lower portion into a first zone (103') to be cooled indirectly by said liquid nitrogen and a second zone (103'') to be cooled indirectly by mechanical refrigeration.
 23. An apparatus as claimed in any of Claims 17 to 22, including means (121) for introducing nitrogen from said cooling means (108) into the upper portion (103) of said vessel (102).
 24. An apparatus as claimed in any of Claims 17 to 23, wherein said means for moving said cavities (106) comprises a stepping motor (107).
 25. An apparatus as claimed in any of the Claims 17 to

24, comprising a tunnel (202), a mould (205) in the form of a continuous belt mounted in said tunnel (202), said mould (205) having a plurality of cavities (206) therein, means (209,210) to admit a coolant into said tunnel (202), means (220) for filling said cavities (206) with ice lolly solution, means (225) for moving said cavities (206) and means (224) for inserting sticks into said cavities (206) downstream of said filling means (220).

Patentansprüche

1. Verfahren zur Herstellung von luftversetzter Eiscreme oder Schokoladeneis durch Gefrieren einer wässrigen Flüssigkeit, wobei das Verfahren die Schritte:

a) des Vorkühlens einer Form auf eine Temperatur, die ausreichend kalt ist, so daß die gefrorene wässrige Flüssigkeit leicht von besagter Form abgelöst werden kann, und die bei oder kälter als -60 °C ist, aber nicht so kalt ist, daß die gefrorene wässrige Flüssigkeit strukturellem Schaden unterworfen ist;

b) des Einbringens der wässrigen Flüssigkeit in besagte Form;

c) des Gefrierenlassens Wenigstens der Wässrigen Flüssigkeit in Kontakt mit besagter Form und

d) des Ablöses besagter gefrorener wässriger Flüssigkeit von besagter Form umfaßt.

2. Verfahren zur Herstellung eines Eiskutschers durch Gefrieren einer wässrigen Flüssigkeit, wobei das Verfahren die Schritte:

a) des Vorkühlens einer Form auf eine Temperatur, die ausreichend kalt ist, so daß die gefrorene wässrige Flüssigkeit leicht von besagter Form abgelöst werden kann, und die bei oder kälter als -60 °C ist, aber nicht kälter als -85 °C ist, so daß die gefrorene wässrige Flüssigkeit strukturellem Schaden nicht unterworfen ist;

b) des Einbringens der wässrigen Flüssigkeit in besagte Form;

c) des Gefrierenlassens wenigstens der Wässrigen Flüssigkeit in Kontakt mit besagter Form und

d) des Ablöses besagter gefrorener wässriger Flüssigkeit von besagter Form umfaßt.

3. Das Verfahren nach einem vorstehenden Anspruch, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß eine solche Form nicht auf Weniger als -85 °C vorgekühlt ist.

4. Das Verfahren nach Anspruch 3, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte Form nicht auf eine Tempe-

ratur Weniger als -80 °C vorgekühlt ist.

5. Das Verfahren nach Anspruch 4, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte Form auf eine Temperatur von -70 °C bis -80 °C vorgekühlt ist.

6. Das Verfahren nach jedem vorstehenden Anspruch, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß Wenigstens ein Teil der besagten Form eine mittlere Wandstärke von wenigstens 1 mm hat.

7. Das Verfahren nach Anspruch 6, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß wenigstens ein Teil der besagten Form eine mittlere Wandstärke von Wenigstens 2 mm hat.

8. Das Verfahren nach jedem vorstehenden Anspruch, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte Wässrige Flüssigkeit Zucker enthält.

9. Das Verfahren nach jedem vorstehenden Anspruch, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß nur der an die Form angrenzenden Wässrigen Flüssigkeit erlaubt wird, zu gefrieren, um einen Überzug zu bilden, und daß besagtes Verfahren den Schritt des Extrahierens der (ungefrorenen) Flüssigkeit aus besagten Formen einschließt, so daß besagter Überzug eine Hülle bildet.

10. Das Verfahren nach jedem vorstehenden Anspruch, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte Kühlgeschwindigkeit in besagter Flüssigkeit 1 mm von der Grenzfläche zwischen besagter Flüssigkeit und besagter Form Wenigstens 650 °C/min wenigstens während des Anfangsgefrierens ist.

11. Das Verfahren nach Anspruch 10, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte Kühlgeschwindigkeit wenigstens 750 °C/min ist.

12. Das Verfahren nach jedem vorstehenden Anspruch, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Geschwindigkeit des Wärmetransfers anschließend an die Bildung des anfänglich gefrorenen Überzuges auf einem ausreichenden Niveau gehalten wird, um das Auftauen des besagten Überzuges zu verhindern.

13. Das Verfahren nach jedem vorstehenden Anspruch, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte Form umgedreht wird, um besagte gefrorene Flüssigkeit von besagter Form abzulösen.

14. Das Verfahren nach Anspruch 13, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte Form gerüttelt wird, um das Ablösen der besagten gefrorenen Flüssigkeit zu ermöglichen.

15. Das Verfahren nach Anspruch 14, dadurch gekennzeichnet,

zeichnet, daß besagte Form gegen einem Stab fallengelassen wird, wenn sie umgedreht wird, um das Ablösen der besagten gefrorenen Flüssigkeit zu ermöglichen.

16. Das Verfahren nach jedem vorstehenden Anspruch, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß es den Schritt des Verwendens mechanischer Kühlung einschließt, um das Gefrieren besagter wässriger Flüssigkeit nach dem Einbringen in besagte Form zu unterstützen.

17. Vorrichtung zum Durchführen eines Verfahrens nach Anspruch 2, wobei besagte Vorrichtung, die ein Gefäß (102), eine Form (105), die besagtes Gefäß (102) in einen oberen Teil (103) und einen unteren Teil (104) teilt, Mittel (111), um ein Kühlmittel in besagten unteren Teil (104) einzulassen, Mittel (112), um das Kühlmittel aus besagtem unteren Teil (104) zu entnehmen, Mittel (120) zum Füllen der besagten Hohlräume (106) mit Eislutscherlösung, Mittel (107) zum Bewegen besagter Hohlräume (106), Mittel zum Einführen von Stäben in besagte Hohlräume unterhalb von besagten Füllmitteln (120) und Mittel zum Entnehmen der gefrorenen Eislutscher aus besagten Hohlräumen (105) und Mittel (108) zum Kühlen besagten Kühlmittels mit flüssigem Stickstoff umfaßt, dadurch gekennzeichnet ist, daß besagte Form (105; 205), die Hohlräume (106; 206) hat, aus wärmeleitfähigem Material hergestellt ist und eine mittlere Stärke von wenigstens 1 mm hat.

18. Die Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 17, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte mittlere Stärke wenigstens 2 mm ist.

19. Die Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 17 oder 18, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagtes wärmeleitfähiges Material aus der Gruppe ausgewählt ist, die Edelstahl, Kupfer, Aluminium, Messing und Gemische davon umfaßt.

20. Die Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 17, 18 oder 19, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte Form wenigstens einen Durchgang hat, durch den ein Tiefkühlmittel strömen kann.

21. Die Vorrichtung nach jedem der Ansprüche 17 bis 20, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß sie Mittel zum Sprühen des Kühlmittels gegen besagte Hohlräume einschließt.

22. Die Vorrichtung nach jedem der Ansprüche 17 bis 21, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß sie Mittel zum Teilen des besagten unteren Teils in eine erste Zone (103), die durch besagten flüssigen Stickstoff indirekt gekühlt wird, und in eine zweite Zone (103')

einschließt, die durch mechanische Kühlung indirekt gekühlt wird.

23. Die Vorrichtung nach jedem der Ansprüche 17 bis 22, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß sie Mittel (121) zum Einbringen von Stickstoff aus besagten Kühlmitteln (108) in den oberen Teil (103) des besagten Gefäßes (102) einschließt.

24. Die Vorrichtung nach jedem der Ansprüche 17 bis 23, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß besagte Mittel zum Bewegen besagter Hohlräume (106) einen Schrittmotor (107) umfassen.

25. Vorrichtung nach jedem der Ansprüche 17 bis 24, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß sie einen Tunnel (202), eine Form (205) in Gestalt eines ununterbrochenen Bandes, das in besagtem Tunnel (202) montiert ist, wobei besagte Form (205) eine Vielzahl von Hohlräumen (206) darin hat, Mittel (209, 210), um ein Kühlmittel in besagten Tunnel (202) einzulassen, Mittel (220) zum Füllen der besagten Hohlräume (206) mit Eislutscherlösung, Mittel (225) zum Bewegen besagter Hohlräume (206) und Mittel (224) zum Einführen von Stäben in besagte Hohlräume (206) unterhalb von besagten Füllmitteln (220) umfaßt.

Revendications

1. Procédé pour préparer des glaces, sucettes glacées ou esquimaux par congélation d'un liquide aqueux, lequel procédé comprend les étapes consistant à :

- a) pré-refroidir un moule à une température suffisamment froide pour que le liquide aqueux congelé puisse être facilement libéré du moule et à une température égale ou inférieure à -60°C mais n'atteignant pas une température telle que le liquide aqueux congelé subisse une détérioration de structure ;
- b) introduire le liquide aqueux dans le moule ;
- c) permettre au moins au liquide aqueux en contact avec le moule de congeler ; et
- d) libérer le liquide aqueux congelé du moule.

2. Procédé pour la préparation d'une sucette glacée ou esquimaux par congélation d'un liquide aqueux, lequel procédé comprend les étapes consistant à :

- a) pré-refroidir un moule à une température suffisamment froide pour que le liquide aqueux congelé puisse être facilement libéré du moule et à une température égale ou inférieure à -60°C mais non inférieure à -85°C afin que le liquide aqueux congelé ne subisse pas de détérioration de structure ;

- b) introduire le liquide aqueux dans le moule ;
 c) permettre au moins au liquide aqueux en contact avec le moule de congeler ; et
 d) libérer le liquide aqueux congelé du moule.
3. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel le moule n'est pas pré-refroidi à une température inférieure à -85°C.
 4. Procédé selon la revendication 3, caractérisé en ce que le moule n'est pas pré-refroidi à une température inférieure à -80°C.
 5. Procédé selon la revendication 4, caractérisé en ce que le moule est pré-refroidi à une température allant de -70°C à -80°C.
 6. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce qu'au moins une partie du moule a une épaisseur de paroi moyenne d'au moins 1 mm.
 7. Procédé selon la revendication 6, caractérisé en ce qu'au moins une partie du moule a une épaisseur de paroi moyenne d'au moins 2 mm.
 8. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que le liquide aqueux contient du sucre.
 9. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que seul le liquide aqueux contigu au moule est laissé à congeler pour former une croûte et en ce que le procédé comprend l'étape consistant à extraire le liquide (non gelé) du moule de sorte que la croûte forme une coquille.
 10. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que la vitesse de refroidissement dans le liquide à 1 mm de l'interface entre le liquide et le moule est d'au moins 650°C/minute au moins pendant la congélation initiale.
 11. Procédé selon la revendication 14, caractérisé en ce que la vitesse de refroidissement est d'au moins 750°C/minute.
 12. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que la vitesse de transfert thermique consécutive à la formation d'une croûte congelée initiale est maintenue à un niveau suffisant pour empêcher la décongélation de la croûte.
 13. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que le moule est retourné pour libérer le liquide congelé du moule.
 14. Procédé selon la revendication 13, dans lequel le moule est secoué dans un pot pour faciliter la libération du liquide congelé.
 15. Procédé selon la revendication 14, dans lequel le moule est descendu contre une barre lorsqu'il est retourné pour faciliter la libération du liquide congelé.
 16. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, comprenant l'étape consistant à utiliser une réfrigération mécanique pour faciliter la congélation du liquide aqueux après introduction dans le moule.
 17. Appareil pour la réalisation d'un procédé selon la revendication 2, l'appareil comprenant un récipient (102), un moule (105) divisant le récipient (102) en une portion supérieure (103) et en une portion inférieure (104), des moyens (111) pour recevoir un agent réfrigérant dans la portion inférieure (104), des moyens (112) pour prélever le réfrigérant de la portion inférieure (104), des moyens (120) pour remplir les cavités (106) d'une solution de sucettes glacées ou d'esquimaux, des moyens (107) pour déplacer les cavités (106), des moyens pour introduire des bâtonnets dans les cavités en aval des moyens de remplissage (120) et des moyens pour prélever les sucettes glacées ou esquimaux congelés des cavités (105) et des moyens (108) pour refroidir l'agent réfrigérant avec de l'azote liquide, caractérisé en ce que le moule (105 ; 205) a des cavités (106 ; 206) réalisées à partir d'un matériau thermiquement conducteur et d'une épaisseur moyenne d'au moins 1 mm.
 18. Appareil selon la revendication 17, dans lequel l'épaisseur moyenne est d'au moins 2 mm.
 19. Appareil selon la revendication 17 ou 18, dans lequel le matériau conducteur thermiquement est choisi dans le groupe comprenant l'acier inoxydable, le cuivre, l'aluminium, le laiton et leurs mélanges.
 20. Appareil selon la revendication 17, 18, 19, dans lequel le moule a au moins un passage pour permettre à un agent cryogénique de le traverser.
 21. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications 17 à 20, comprenant des moyens pour pulvériser un agent réfrigérant contre les cavités.
 22. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications 17 à 21, comprenant des moyens pour diviser la portion inférieure en une première zone (103) à

refroidir indirectement par l'azote liquide et une seconde zone (103") à refroidir indirectement par une réfrigération mécanique.

23. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications 5
17 à 22, comprenant des moyens (121) pour intro-
duire l'azote à partir des moyens de refroidissement
(108) dans la portion supérieure (103) du récipient
(102). 10
24. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications
17 à 23, dans lequel les moyens pour déplacer les
cavités (106) comprennent un moteur pas-à-pas
(107). 15
25. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications
17 à 24, comprenant un tunnel (202), un moule
(205) sous forme de bande continue montée dans
le tunnel (202), le moule (205) ayant une pluralité
de cavités (206), des moyens (209, 210) pour per- 20
mettre l'amenée d'un agent réfrigérant dans le tun-
nel (202), des moyens (220) pour remplir les
cavités (206) avec une solution de sucettes glacées
ou esquimaux, des moyens (225) pour déplacer les
cavités (206) et des moyens (224) pour introduire 25
les bâtonnets dans les cavités (206) en aval des
moyens de remplissage (220).

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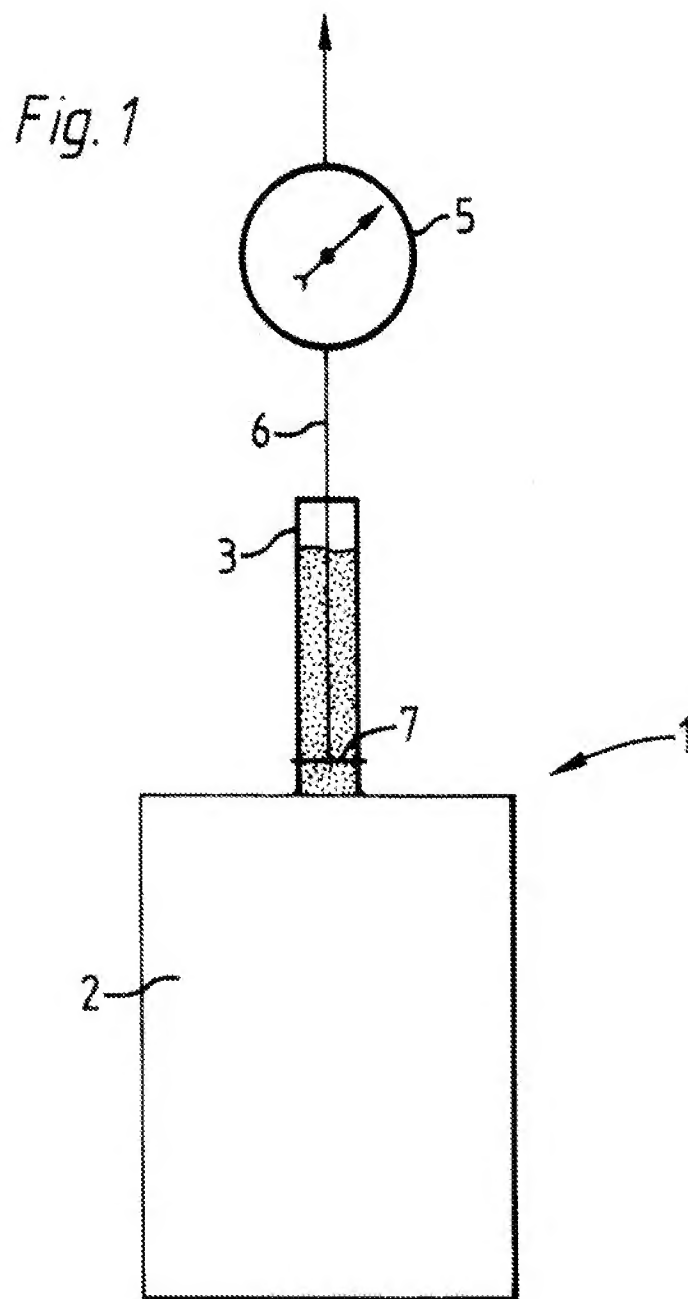
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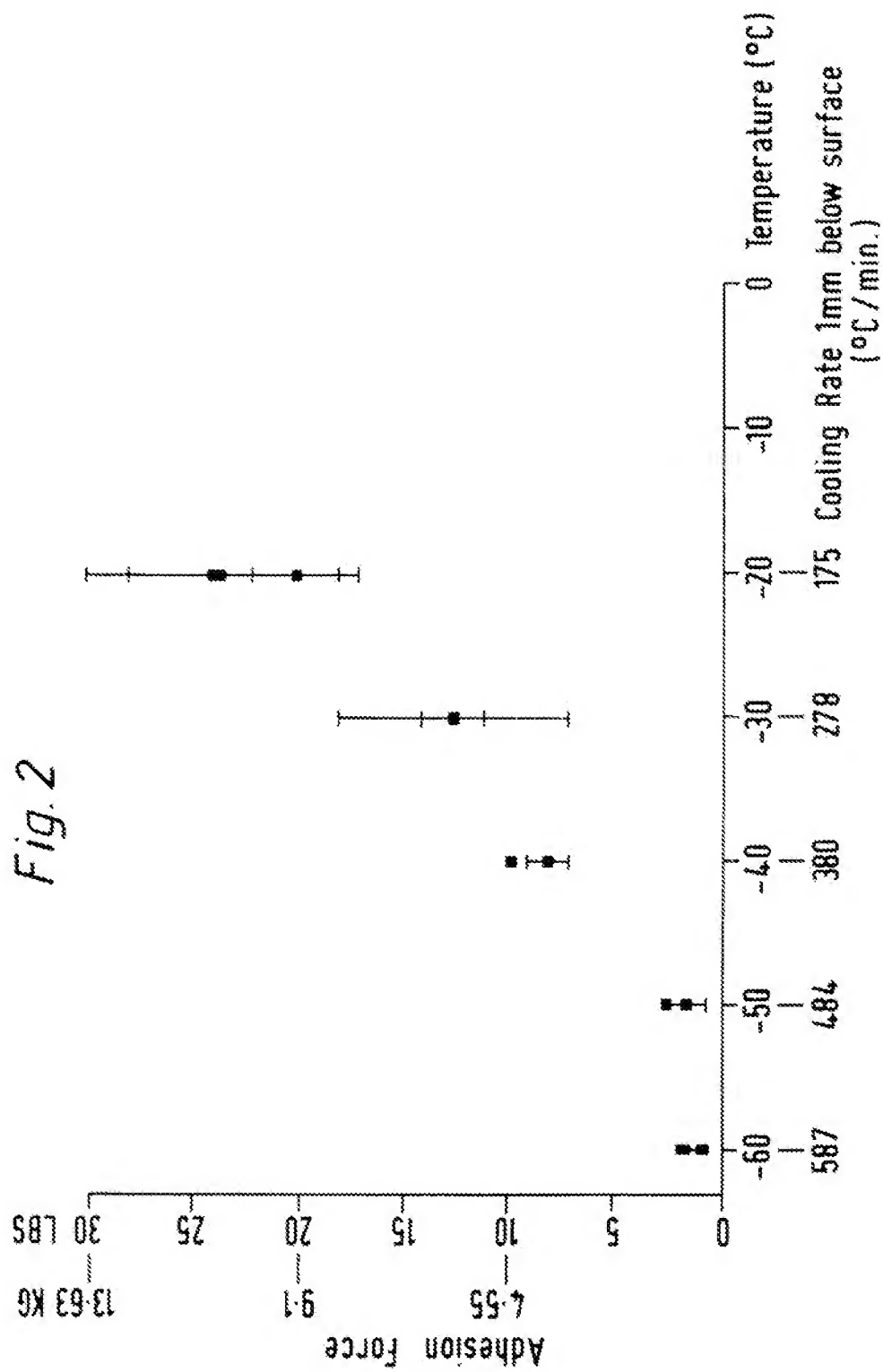
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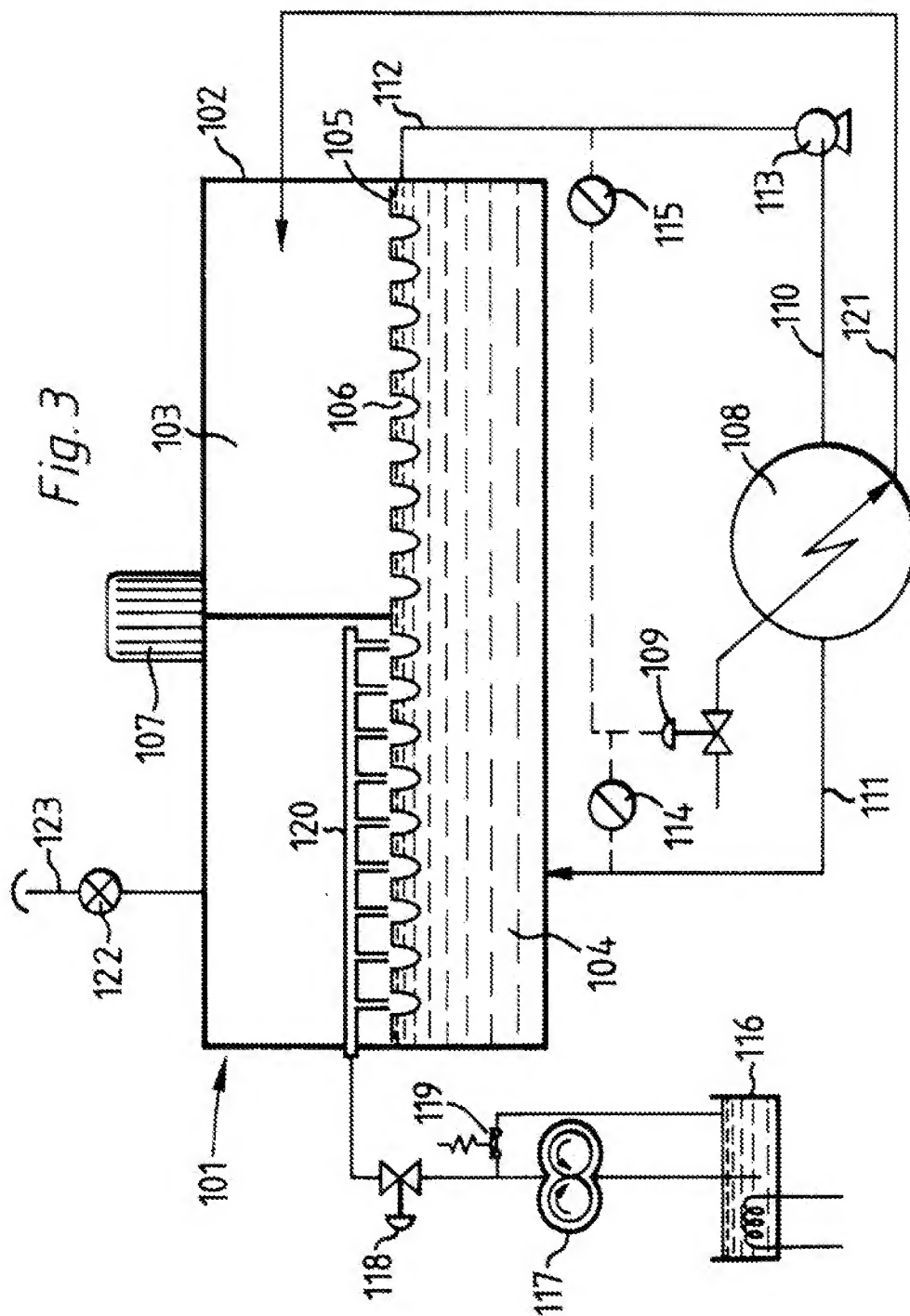
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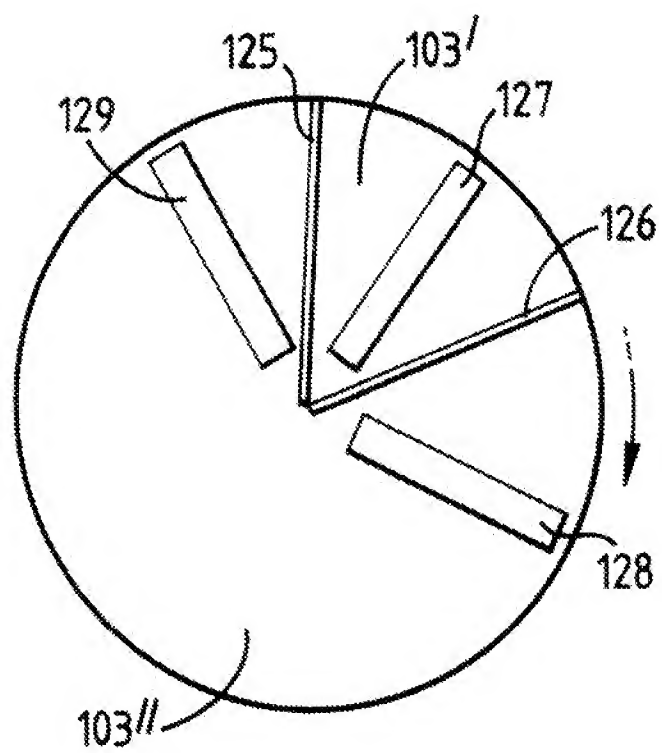


Fig. 4

